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SUBJECT: Seven Cabinet Reshuffles in Six Months

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade's latest cabinet reshuffle sees former Secretary General of the Presidency, Abdoulaye Balde, become the Minister of Defense while Interior Minister Cheikh Tidiane Sy is replaced at the Ministry by Bécaye Diop who was Minister of Defense for the past seven years. Aminata Tall, the former Mayor of Diourbel who had fallen out of favor, replaces Balde as Senior Minister and Secretary General of the President's Office. Adama Sall, who was fired six months ago from the cabinet, returns as Minister in charge of Sanitation and Hygiene. End Summary.

Will Casamance receive more attention?

¶2. (SBU) Abdoulaye Balde, the new Minister of Defense, is a police chief by training. He has a doctorate in law and served as a senior executive in the civil service and as Chief of Staff under former President Abdou Diouf. President Wade lured Balde into electoral politics to defeat the Socialist Mayor of Ziguinchor, Robert Sagna, in March of this year. Balde has served as a mentor and close collaborator for the President's son Karim. This is his first foray as a cabinet member and outside of the president's inner circle. By picking a native of the Casamance as Minister of Defense, President Wade seems to be signaling that his government is ready to take a more active approach to resolving the 28-year-old conflict in the Casamance region where violence has been escalating throughout the year. Balde now faces the difficult job of restraining an army that suffered a number of deadly attacks recently while also seeking to de-escalate the conflict by bringing the rebels to the negotiating table.

A New Minister of Interior

¶3. (SBU) The powerful position of Minister of Interior is now held by Bécaye Diop. He is a retired elementary school teacher and one of Wade's most loyal political companions. Diop is also a native from Casamance where he is Mayor of the city of Kolda. He is part of Wade's strategy to have supportive senior party figures in key positions to allow the smooth implementation of his succession plan. Additionally, Cheikh Tidiane Sy's removal opens the way for a return to the government of former Prime Minister Idrissa Seck with whom Sy had a very tense relationship.

The President is Lost

¶4. (SBU) Former Prime Minister Macky Sall told EmbOffs that the President was not really as in control of the game as it seemed, "a close aide of Wade told me that for the first time he feels that the President has lost his way." Commenting on the reshuffle, Sall indicated that it is a strengthening of Karim's camp. He described Bécaye Diop who served under him when he was Prime Minister, as "a yes man who will do whatever Wade wants." Commenting on Aminata Tall's appointment as Secretary General of the President's office, Sall noted "this is a direct result of her threat to join my camp." Sall also thinks that Wade is making a major push to reclaim areas

he lost to the opposition in the March local elections. For example, Adama Sall is the fifth cabinet member who is a native from the Fouta region which is Sall's stronghold. Sall confirmed that he will not return to Wade's party and that he will run for President in 2012. However, he added that Wade may well call an early election in 2010 to wrong foot a divided and unprepared opposition.

15. (SBU) Comment: Faced with declining popularity and a difficult financial situation, Wade may have accepted the need to dialogue with his opposition. Macky Sall said that Wade has always told him that he does not believe in such dialogue but that he will use it to appease the opposition to gain time to plan his succession, which at the moment involves placing loyal allies in key positions. End Comment.

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